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S E C R E T TEL AVIV 000952

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/28/2019
TAGS: PREL PTER MOPS EG KWBG IS
SUBJECT: GOI BRIEFS CODEL LOWEY ON EGYPTIAN EFFORTS TO HALT
WEAPONS SMUGGLING

REF: A. TEL AVIV 895
B. TEL AVIV 887

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Luis G. Moreno, Reason 1.4 (b) (d)

¶1. (S) Summary. During CODEL Lowey's April 16 meetings with the Israeli leadership (other subjects reported reftels), Prime Minister Netanyahu, Defense Minister Barak and IDF Chief of General Staff Ashkenazi commented on Egypt's role in stopping the smuggling to weapons and explosives into Gaza. The Israelis all said that while Egypt's performance has improved in the past few months, there is still much more that Egypt should do, including arresting key smugglers in the Sinai and improving controls along the border with Sudan and the Suez Canal crossings. They also all urged the CODEL, which was scheduled to visit Cairo the next day, to stress to the Egyptians the importance that the U.S. attaches to this issue. End Summary.

¶2. (S) Prime Minister Netanyahu told the CODEL that the Egyptians "recognize more than ever" that the flow of weapons to Hamas threatens Egypt as well as Israel. The Egyptians know that the arms pipeline runs from Iran to Sudan to Egypt. Netanyahu said the Egyptians could do more to stop it, but at least they now grasp the extent of the threat. Asked why Egypt was not acting against smuggling with greater determination, Netanyahu suggested that the moderate Arabs have told their people for decades that Israel is the source of all the region's problems, and now that they are faced with the Iranian threat they are caught in a trap of their own making. Netanyahu said he looks forward to working with President Mubarak, adding that we all need to start thinking outside the box.

¶3. (S) IDF Chief of General Staff Lt. General Gabi Ashkenazi told the CODEL that Egypt had played a positive role during Operation Cast Lead by keeping the Rafah border crossing closed. The Egyptians, he commented, finally understand the need to weaken Hamas, although he added that he did not like Egypt's efforts to promote a Palestinian national unity government. Ashkenazi said he would like to see Egypt take more decisive steps against smuggling, including along the Sudanese border. The Egyptians could also go after the major smugglers and do more to control smuggling across the Suez Canal crossings. Asked whether the limitations on Egypt's capabilities were due to their need for more border guards, Ashkenazi said Israel had agreed to increase the number of Central Security Forces police, but not border guards. Israel is ready to share not just intelligence, but also

technical ideas. Ashkenazi noted that the IDF plans to continue the discussion of these ideas to the Egyptian military in a mil-mil meeting scheduled to take place in about two weeks.

¶4. (S) Defense Minister Barak told the CODEL that it "should be simple" for Egypt to stop the smuggling. Barak commented that the Egyptians listen carefully to the U.S. and urged the CODEL to tell the Egyptians that it is very important to the U.S. that Egypt do whatever it can to stop the smuggling. Noting that Israel is sharing a great deal of intelligence about smuggling with Egypt, Barak said it was not a matter of sharing intelligence but of how Egypt used the intelligence. Asking the CODEL not to mention this point to the Egyptians, Barak said some Israeli analysts think the Egyptian government and security services are afraid to go after the Bedouin smuggling rings in Sinai because they are afraid that the Bedouin will retaliate by sabotaging the tourist industry. Barak reiterated that only a clear message from the U.S. will convince the Egyptians to tackle the problem more effectively. Barak added that if the Egyptian military thinks that Lt. General Petraeus is paying close attention to their efforts, it would make a difference. Barak stated that Egypt has enough police and security forces to do the job.

¶5. (U) CODEL Lowey did not have the opportunity to clear this cable.

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